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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3465
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMCSSU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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SUBJECT: OSCE CENTER HIGHLIGHTS POSITIVE COOPERATION WITH TURKMEN GOVERNMENT

¶11. (SBU) On October 1, the Head of the OSCE Center in Ashgabat, Ambassador Arsim Zekolli, briefed representatives of OSCE-member country embassies on the activities of the Center during the past year. The briefing was based on Zekolli's Report to the OSCE Permanent Council on September 3, but also included presentations by OSCE staff responsible for implementation of projects in the Center's three main areas of activity. In his overall assessment, Zekolli noted the Center's increasingly positive cooperation with the Turkmen government, in both its quantitative and qualitative aspects. Quantitatively, the number of projects and events has increased. Qualitatively, the Turkmen government is more actively engaged in OSCE projects and the projects themselves have more scope and depth. Zekolli was positive about prospects for further cooperation, citing the following factors: an increased number of meetings for OSCE staff with government officials; a greater interest by the Turkmen government in international contacts, including with international organizations; and more openness on the part of the Turkmen government to consider proposals for OSCE activities involving ideas that to date have not circulated in the country. The Center has proposed 30 projects for 2010, subject government approval. This would be an increase over the 28 projects approved for 2009, which for the first time included areas such as media and penitentiary reform. Zekolli mentioned that the Turkmen ambassador to the OSCE, in his response to the Report, had expressed the Turkmen government's willingness to continue carrying out reforms, and that the OSCE assured the government of its willingness to continue cooperation along that path.

¶12. (SBU) In the political-military dimension, the Center has focused on border security/management and anti-drug trafficking projects. Two projects have involved joint training of Turkmen and Afghan customs officials. In the economic-environmental dimension, emphasis has been on supporting a market-driven agriculture sector and the economic use of water resources. In the human dimension, in addition to providing legal consultations to 250 individuals, the Center carried out projects in penitentiary reform, anti-trafficking in persons, and support for legal reform and rule of law.

¶13. (SBU) Throughout the briefing, Kazakh Ambassador to

Turkmenistan Askhat Orazbay, as representative of the incoming OSCE chairmanship, sat next to Zekolli at the head table. Commenting on the Kazakh chairmanship, Zekolli emphasized its importance for the entire Central Asian region and said its chairmanship was awaited with "impatience." The Kazakh ambassador remarked that it will be easier for the OSCE Center in Ashgabat to do its work when the chairperson-in-office (CiO) has an embassy in country. He noted that it is special to have a Central Asian country as CiO and that as CiO, the Kazakhs will work to achieve the goals and objectives set forth for Turkmenistan. Orazbay added that Kazakhstan considers itself the "collective candidate" from Central Asia and will take the recommendations of its neighbors into consideration.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: It remains to be seen what, if any, difference it makes to the OSCE's program in Turkmenistan that the OSCE CiO will be Turkmenistan's neighbor. That many of the issues that the OSCE seeks to address in Turkmenistan, such as legal and market reform, democratic institution building and border control, are "internal matters" raises the question of how much the Kazakhs would be willing to irritate the Turkmen and risk their bilateral relationship in order to advance the OSCE agenda. END COMMENT.

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